

# INSPECTION REPORT

**PLESSINGTON CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL  
TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE**

Bebington

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105109

Headteacher: Miss Adrienne Burns

Lead inspector: Mr Ken Valentine

Dates of inspection: 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Inspection number: 259384

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1296
School address:	Old Chester Road Bebington Wirrall Merseyside
Postcode:	CH63 7LF
Telephone number:	0151 6455049
Fax number:	0151 6431516
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr H. Suffield
Date of previous inspection:	26 <sup>th</sup> January 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Plessington Catholic High School Technology College is a larger than average 11-19 comprehensive, voluntary-aided school with 1296 pupils on roll, including 187 in the sixth form. The school has technology college status and has received a number of awards, the most prominent of which are Beacon Status and a School Achievement Award in 2003. The school is distinctive in its Catholic ethos and also in the service it provides to the local community through the Basil Hume Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

The catchment area is socially and economically disadvantaged: about 36 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, a figure which is about twice the national average. Within the last three years about 70 pupils have joined the school following the closure of a neighbouring Catholic secondary school. The new pupils have been a welcome addition to the Plessington community, but the event has inevitably been challenging for both the school and the pupils involved. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs (including statements) is broadly in line with the national average. Pupil mobility is also broadly average. A small percentage of pupils are of minority ethnic background, and a small number of pupils have English as an additional language. The school has been required to work under difficult circumstances for many months because of an extensive building programme.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average. The catchment area of the school is affected by intake arrangements at local grammar schools and the number of higher attaining pupils transferring to Plessington from primary schools is well below average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2277	Ken Valentine	Lead inspector	
13459	Eva Mills	Lay inspector	
6477	Graham Haney	Team inspector	Mathematics
2059	Susan Cameron	Team inspector	Mathematics
11764	Pauleen Flannery	Team inspector	English
17919	Jennifer Deans	Team inspector	English
18076	Howard Dodd	Team inspector	Science
33069	Sean O'Reilly	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
2225	Pamela Freund	Team inspector	Art
33078	Keith Worrall	Team inspector	Citizenship; Geography
30854	Susan Foster	Team inspector	History
12044	John Lemon	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
7222	Alan Watson	Team inspector	Music
3965	Lyn Taylor	Team inspector	Physical education
17368	Geoff Lewis	Team inspector	Special educational needs
18080	Alan Hendry	Team inspector	Design and technology
3548	Gwyn Hughes	Team inspector	Design and technology

The inspection contractor was:

peakschoolhaus Ltd  
BPS Business Centre  
Brake Lane  
Boughton  
Newark  
Notts  
NG22 9HQ

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>12</b>
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>16</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>46</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Plessington Catholic High School Technology College is a good school with some very good features. It provides good value for money. It is a strongly improving school and this is reflected in the improvement in pupils' standards of attainment which is above the national trend. Most pupils achieve standards of attainment in line with their capabilities or above what might be expected. They receive a good quality of education.

### THE SCHOOL'S MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The school has shown significant improvement in pupils' standards of attainment since the time of the last inspection.
- Many pupils achieve well in assessments at age 16.
- The school is very well led.
- Much of the teaching is good.
- There is an effective programme of teaching and learning initiatives seeking further improvement in provision.
- This is a self-reflecting school with very good review arrangements.
- There is very good provision for pupils identified as vulnerable.
- Some lower attaining pupils underachieve both at age 14 and 16.
- Too many pupils express reservations about the way in which their views are treated and how their efforts and contribution are valued.
- The level of fixed term exclusions is too high.
- The quality of the school's provision is such that too few pupils undertake courses in modern foreign languages and in music in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- There is too much inconsistency in the use of assessment and target setting to guide the efforts of both teachers and pupils.

### HOW THE SCHOOL HAS CHANGED SINCE THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION

In most aspects the school has improved substantially since the last inspection in 1998. There has been a significant improvement in the standards of pupils' attainment at age 16. The key issues from the last Ofsted inspection have been appropriately addressed, although there is some inconsistency in the access pupils have to information and communication technology (ICT) resources, and further improvement is still required in the provision for music. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are not as good as those found at the time of the last inspection, although the school is working hard to address this issue.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	n/a	C	C	A
Year 13	A/AS-level and VCE examinations	E	E	D	

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Taking the school as a whole, pupils' **achievement is good**.

Pupils' standards of attainment at Year 9 were below average in 2003, but are judged to be average in work seen in this inspection. Pupils are considered to achieve well in relation to their capabilities.

At Year 11 pupils' standards of attainment in 2003 were average, although the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A\*/C grades was 62%, considerably above average. In work seen during the inspection standards of pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11 were considered to be average. In these year groups, pupils' progress is considered to be good. In the sixth form students' standards of attainment in 2003 were below average, although students achieved in line with their capabilities, and sometimes better than might be expected. Work seen during this inspection represented average standards.

Standards of pupils' attainment in English are very good, with boys doing particularly well in Years 9 and 11. Standards in mathematics are below average and in science they are average. Standards in ICT are above average. Very good results have been recorded in art, design and technology, history and physical education. Progress by some lower attaining pupils at age 14 and 16 is unsatisfactory. The number of pupils gaining success in Years 11 and 13 in modern foreign languages and music is unsatisfactory.

The improvement in pupils' standards of attainment in Years 9 and 11 shows a trend which is above the national trend.

Pupils' **personal development** and their **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good**. Generally, pupils show **good attitudes**. However, pupils' behaviour up to Year 11 is only **satisfactory** because of the behaviour of a minority.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The **quality of education is good**. Overall, **teaching is good** throughout the school. Particular strengths are noted in English, ICT, history, art, physical education and vocational subjects, and in additional provision for pupils with special educational needs. The quality of pupils' learning is largely good throughout. The school curriculum is satisfactory overall, with strengths in the provision of vocational subjects, and programmes intended to develop teaching and learning styles. Improvements are required in the curriculum for music and modern foreign languages.

Plessington is a caring school which offers pupils good guidance and support. The school has good links with parents, the community and other schools and colleges.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The **leadership and management are very good**. The leadership of the headteacher and other key staff is very good. The effectiveness of the management throughout the school is good. Governors are effective in their role and work well with school leaders and managers to offer clear educational direction.

The headteacher offers the school experience, wisdom and a real sense of purpose. Other key staff demonstrate a range of skills and talent, and show commitment to future improvement. Particular strengths are noted in teaching and learning initiatives and also in the efficient working of the school through innovations in management systems.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents confirm a good level of satisfaction with the work of the school. This view is not entirely shared by pupils: students in the sixth form express satisfaction with the school, but pupils below the age of 16 express a greater degree of reservation. Two major areas of disquiet on the part of younger pupils relate to the behaviour of pupils, and the extent to which the school takes account of their views and values their efforts and contribution to the school community. Inspectors judge that the school is making appropriate efforts to gain good behaviour on the part of pupils. Inspectors also judge that the school has a clear aim to take account of the views of all pupils and value their talents and contribution to the school community. As yet, the school is not sufficiently clearly communicating this commitment and representing it by practical action.



## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- ensure that lower attaining pupils maintain an at least adequate level of progress throughout the school;
- interpret more clearly the school's commitment in valuing pupils' views in a way which lessens the reservations pupils express regarding the working of the school;
- take action to reduce the high level of fixed term exclusions;
- improve the quality of provision for music and modern foreign languages so that a greater number of pupils want to undertake the courses and subsequently gain success;
- seek greater consistency in target setting so that teachers and pupils are better placed to focus their future efforts.

The disapplication arrangements from the study of modern foreign languages were not properly implemented and did not meet statutory requirements.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT PLESSINGTON CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

### Characteristics of the sixth form

The sixth form is of average size. It offers a satisfactory range of courses at advanced level and an increasing number of vocational courses. There are no minimum entry requirements for sixth formers and it caters for students of all abilities.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is **good** and is **cost-effective**. It has open access, regardless of ability, although it loses some of its students to local colleges. It offers a wider range of courses than at the time of the previous inspection to meet the needs of all the students. Standards of students' attainment in 2003 were below average. Nevertheless, teaching and learning are good in many subjects and many students achieve in line with their capabilities and sometimes better than might be expected.

### THE SIXTH FORM'S MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Leadership and management are good.
- Students make good progress in lessons in relation to their attainment on entry.
- Students receive very good personal and academic support.
- Teaching is generally good, with particular strengths in English, physical education, art and design and design and technology.
- The assessment system is good.
- Students' attitudes are very good.
- Opportunities to develop strong personal values are good.
- Work is not always well matched to students' abilities.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory; students are sometimes taught in non-specialist rooms.
- Some students do not perceive themselves to be treated as young adults.

## QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>English: Very Good</b> Students achieve highly. Teaching and learning are very good.
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory</b> Achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Science	<b>Physics: Satisfactory</b> Students show sound achievement. Teaching and learning are good.
Information and communication technology	<b>Satisfactory</b> Students achieve satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Humanities	<b>History: Good</b> Students' achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Art and design: Good</b> Achievement is very good. Teaching and learning are good. <b>Design and technology (product design and textiles): Good</b> Achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<b>Physical education: Good</b> At AS-level achievement is good. Teaching and learning is very good. At A2 (Advanced) level, achievement is unsatisfactory, although teaching is good.
Business	<b>Business studies: Good</b> Achievement is satisfactory and teaching is good.

*The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.*

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Advice, guidance and support for students are good. Students are well supported in their academic work and pastoral support is very good. Tutors know their students well and relationships are good. Individual target-setting, action planning, reviews and mentoring all help to ensure that students make at least sound progress. Innovative support programmes, such as the Peak Performance Programme linked to ICT, are being piloted in order to improve learning and increase academic achievement.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is well led and managed. The numbers entering the sixth form are steady and the school is beginning to attract students from other schools. Data is used well and is integrated into the review programme. Planning has taken account of the diverse abilities of the students who are offered a satisfactory range of courses to meet their needs.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The majority are happy with the sixth form and with the quality of their teaching, although they complain about not being treated as mature, young adults. Their complaints about the limited accommodation and lack of access to the common room are justified, although these should be overcome in the near future when the new buildings are completed. Students commented that relationships with teachers are very good and they are given good support. They feel happy with the advice given to them for the next stage in their education.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- improve the quality of provision for music and modern foreign languages so that a greater number of students want to undertake the courses and subsequently gain success;
- provide a wider range of courses to cater for the diverse needs of students.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses**

In 2003 standards attained by pupils in Year 11 were considerably above average, although the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A\*/C grades was 62%, considerably above the national average. In 2003 pupils in Year 9 attained standards which were below the national average, but which represented achievement in line with their capabilities. Lower attaining pupils made less progress and some underachieved. The trend of improvement of pupils' standards of attainment throughout the school is above the national trend.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has gained improving standards in pupils' attainment in recent years.
- Many pupils achieve well in relation to those in similar schools and in relation to their prior attainment.
- Some lower attaining pupils underachieve, particularly in mathematics in Year 11.
- Too few pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form undertake courses in modern foreign languages and music, and subsequently gain success.
- Many pupils show very good standards of attainment in English throughout the school, and in particular many boys achieve better than might be expected.
- Very good standards of pupils' attainment are recorded in art, history, design and technology and physical education.
- Pupils who receive additional support for special educational needs attain well in relation to their capabilities.

#### **Commentary**

1. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are below the national average. Due to the nature of the catchment and intake arrangements at local grammar schools the percentage of pupils on entry to the school who have already gained a higher National Curriculum level in Year 7 is well below the national average.

#### **Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average points scores in 2003**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.9 (35.3)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	33.0 (31.9)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	31.4 (31.4)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 200 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. The 2003 National Curriculum assessment of pupils in Year 9 showed that standards in the school were below average, taking together the subjects English, mathematics and science. However, compared to pupils' prior attainment at the age of 11 the standards achieved demonstrated satisfactory progress. When compared to similar schools, nationally the results at Plessington are very high.
3. For pupils in Year 9 standards attained are very much better in English than those in mathematics and science. English standards were above average in comparison with all schools nationally. Pupils made very good progress since the age of 11. Observations made during the inspection confirm these standards and indicate continuing good progress and learning on the part of pupils. The good progress being made by pupils is largely attributable to their good attitudes and the high quality of teaching being offered by the department.

4. Standards attained by pupils in Year 9 in 2003 in mathematics and science were below the national average. In both subjects pupils made unsatisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment in Year 7. Observations made during this inspection indicate that pupils in mathematics are continuing to make insufficient progress and are likely to underachieve in Year 9. Progress by pupils in science is considered to be satisfactory and pupils are working broadly in line with their capabilities. The progress being made in both these subjects largely reflects the quality of teaching provided. Improvements are needed in mathematics in the teaching of higher attaining pupils.
5. In other subjects of the curriculum standards of attainment are broadly average. Pupils make generally good progress, including those with special educational needs and those who are designated gifted and talented.
6. The trend in improvement in pupils' standards of attainment in Year 9 has been above the national trend over the last five years. The improvement has been most marked in English, with results in the last three years significantly above average. The upward trend in mathematics and science results is rather more modest, leaving pupils' standards of attainment below the national average.

**Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003**

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	62 (55)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	81 (91)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	33.5 (34.7)	34.2 (34.7)

*There were 210 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

7. Overall standards attained by pupils in Year 11 in GCSE/GNVQ examinations in 2003 were broadly in line with the national average, when considering the best eight subjects taken by each pupil. Taking account of all examinations entered by pupils the total qualifications gained were well above average. Standards of pupils' work observed in Years 10 and 11 during this inspection placed pupils' standards of attainment as broadly in line with the national average.
8. Pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 was best for higher attaining pupils. For these pupils progress was very high in relation to their prior attainment in Year 9. Lower attaining pupils made rather less progress, and in the case of some their results demonstrated underachievement. Taking pupils' attainment overall they made very good progress in comparison with pupils in schools of a similar type.
9. In 2003 pupils' standards of attainment in English were very good. This was also found to be the case during the inspection. The good standard of teaching provided by the English department contributes much to pupils' standards of attainment. There are high expectations of what pupils can achieve and there is strong focus on the development of necessary skills. Good standards attained by boys are particularly notable.
10. Standards of pupils' attainment in mathematics were below the national average in 2003 and there is evidence of underachievement. Lower attaining pupils do not make the progress they should and this is an area for development for the school. Standards of pupils' attainment in science, including attainment in the individual science subjects, are broadly in line with the national average. These standards were also found during the inspection.
11. In 2003 pupils' standards of attainment were above the national average in art and design, design and technology, history, and physical education. Standards were broadly in line with the

national average in business studies, communication studies, drama, and history. Pupils' standards of attainment in geography were below average and standards in Spanish were well below average.

12. During the inspection, standards in ICT, citizenship and vocational subjects were judged to be satisfactory. Pupils' use of English language and their literacy skills were observed to be good. Pupils' competence in mathematics was judged to be satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their capabilities and this is also found in the case of gifted and talented pupils.
13. The school shows a good trend of improvement in pupils' standards of attainment at GCSE/GNVQ. The improvement over the last five years is above the national average trend.

#### **Standards in GCE A/AS-level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003**

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	94 (86.1)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	26.3 (24.4)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	190.2 (175.8)	253.1 (254.5)

*There were 60 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

14. Students' standards of attainment were below average in 2003. However, students mostly achieved in line with their capabilities and in some cases students achieved better than might have been expected. During the inspection students demonstrated standards of attainment which were generally average. In some subjects, English, art, history, design and technology and physical education in Year 12, standards were often observed to be good. However, some work in physical education aiming at A-level represented below average standards and unsatisfactory achievement. In the sixth form teaching and learning were judged to be good, and in some lessons observed they were very good. Many students are making at least satisfactory progress.

#### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Attendance rates are **satisfactory overall**. Most pupils have **good** attitudes to their work and behaviour is **satisfactory** in the main school and good in the sixth form. The school's efforts to cultivate pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The number of pupils excluded from the school for fixed terms is very high.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and around school, although the behaviour of a minority of pupils sometimes affects the learning of others.
- Pupils are encouraged to support each other and the programme of peer mentoring and buddying is successful.
- Most pupils attend regularly but Year 11 attendance is unsatisfactory.
- Even allowing for difficulties due to current building work, punctuality to lessons is sometimes unsatisfactory.

#### **Commentary**

15. Attendance rates at the school are only slightly below those achieved nationally and the school works well to encourage and reward good attendance. There is little unauthorised absence. However, attendance of pupils in Years 10 and 11 falls off and in Year 11 is below 90 per cent.

During the inspection there were days when attendance in Year 11 was considerably below this figure. The school's systems to support those whose attendance is poor are well organised and some pupils are referred to the Social Inclusion Unit or to learning mentors who work with them to try to improve attendance. The alternative curriculum provided offsite for some disaffected Year 11 pupils is proving successful in helping to ensure that these pupils remain in the education system with the result that attendance there is good. The school's current building programme causes some delay between lessons. However, this does not account for the lateness of some pupils who sometimes can take up to 20 minutes to move to classes.

## Attendance

### *Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)*

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.2	School data	0.6
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

16. Behaviour in lessons and around school is mostly good and most staff have the classroom management skills to deal with instances of poor behaviour. Some parents and many pupils expressed some concerns about behaviour in school. The school has been recognised for its ability to take in pupils who display challenging behaviour and is in the process of implementing a Behaviour Improvement Plan. The majority of lessons are orderly, and pupils learn well, but there are occasions when the disruptive behaviour of a minority affects the learning of others. The school takes a firm line on discipline and instances of bullying, when reported, are dealt with well. However, the number of pupils excluded from the school for a fixed period is very high indeed. The school's policy to exclude pupils for contravening some rules on dress and appearance is contrary to the spirit of current equal opportunities legislation. During inspection, most pupils were seen to be polite and helpful, getting along well with each other and relating well to their teachers. In general, pupils' attitudes to their work are good. In most lessons they work hard and listen well to their teachers, especially in Years 7 and 9.

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1241	222	1
8		
2		
1		
1		
2		
2		
2		
2	2	
1		
4		
30		

*The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.*

17. The school works well to encourage pupils to be responsible and to respect the feelings of others. All Year 7 pupils and many from other year groups attend a residential retreat. There are ample opportunities for reflection in assemblies and in some subjects, including history and art and design, moral themes are pursued. Pupils support each other as buddies, helping younger pupils to settle in, and as peer mentors.

### **Sixth form**

18. Students in the sixth form show very good attitudes to their work. They get on well with each other and with their tutors and appear confident, mature and responsible. They are particularly appreciative of the support they receive. Some sixth formers have been trained as peer mentors. This involves considerable commitment on their part with a three-day residential training with the Weston Spirit and other ongoing training. Their work with younger pupils includes supporting extra-curricular and homework clubs as well as supporting pupils in the learning support centre. This is seen as beneficial both to the younger pupils and in the personal development of the sixth form students involved. As part of a whole-school initiative to combat racism, 20 students are to visit Auschwitz.
19. Students are supportive of the school and feel that they are encouraged to do their best. Few have any serious criticisms but a significant minority some feel that they are not given enough independence or opportunities to show responsibility.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is **good**. Pupils' learning benefits from a good quality of organisation throughout the school, good teaching and a drive for improvement on the part of leadership and management. There is a sense of innovation and development in the school community.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning **are good overall**. The school is responding well to changes in the character of the school intake. There is now a greater range of pupil need, which has caused an increased emphasis on behaviour management and on broadening the school curriculum. In lessons observed where teaching was good and the curriculum was appropriate, pupils were found to respond well.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school is introducing a number of innovative programmes in teaching and learning styles in order to respond to changing needs of pupils.
- There are well-planned schemes of work, reflecting good teacher knowledge.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, and teachers demonstrate effective behaviour management.
- In some cases work given to pupils does not always closely match their needs.

### **Commentary**

20. A number of innovative programmes are being implemented within the school in order to encourage greater variety in teaching and learning styles. These programmes are intended to respond to the changing needs of the school intake so that pupils have a greater opportunity to engage in active and reflective learning. Involvement in these programmes is at different stages of development across the school, but the indications are that the teaching approaches involved are of benefit to many pupils.
21. Some considerable strengths in teaching were noted in the teaching of English, art and design, and in physical education. In these subjects there is a real emphasis on high expectation on



the part of teachers and a good quality of presentation of knowledge and skills. Pupils confirm a high level of interest in these areas of the curriculum and they gain good standards of attainment.

22. Teaching and learning styles are assisted by the good use of educational resources. In keeping with the school's status of technology college many teachers make good use of ICT facilities in order to promote an understanding of their subject. For example, in a science lesson observed good use was made of a computer to provide animation in a simulation, a diagrammatic summary of ideas, and a helpful presentation of pupils' work for consideration by the class.
23. The school is very aware of the need to strengthen its provision in behaviour management and in seeking an appropriate curriculum for all pupils. During this inspection teachers' efforts were largely successful in behaviour management and appropriate attention is being given to this issue. The introduction of vocational courses and alternative accreditation is being complemented by appropriate development of teaching and learning styles.
24. In some lessons observed during the inspection it was evident that further improvements are needed in order to gain a better match of the work presented with the needs of pupils. Cases were observed where lower attaining pupils found the work difficult to grasp and did not make the progress they should. Examples of this were noted in the teaching of mathematics. In this subject, and others further consideration is needed to the match of work to pupils' abilities.
25. Assessment arrangements are effective and the school is extremely competent in handling statistical information concerning pupils' standards of attainment. However, arrangements are less successful by which pupils are guided on their strengths and weaknesses, and targets for future work. A number of pupils, particularly lower attaining pupils in mathematics, ICT and citizenship, are not sufficiently clear on what they should do to improve their work.

### Sixth form

26. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and there are good arrangements for the assessment of students' work. Teaching observed was best in English, art and design, and in the AS-level course in physical education. In these subjects teaching was judged to be very good. Good teaching was noted in science, history, design and technology and business studies. In each case the quality of students' learning was very closely related to the quality of teaching.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 150 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (1%)	29 (19%)	66 (44%)	43 (29%)	11 (7%)	0	0

*The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.*

### The curriculum

The curriculum is **satisfactory overall**. The vocational provision is generally good, but provision for music and modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory. Overall, the curriculum is broad and balanced. Enrichment and extra-curricular provision are satisfactory. There is currently a major building programme taking place which, when completed, will result in accommodation of good quality and that will enhance the curriculum provision.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of vocational qualifications in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- The school provides good access to the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs.
- Provision for modern foreign languages and music is unsatisfactory.
- The range of vocational accreditation offered does not extend to meet the needs of the less able.
- The opportunities for pupils to participate in sport are good.
- The school effectively evaluates curriculum opportunities to inform planning.
- Poor timetabling affects the art curriculum in Years 10 and 11, and the sixth form.

## Commentary

27. The curriculum meets statutory requirements except for modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11. A large proportion of pupils do not study a foreign language in Years 10 and 11 and correct procedures for formal disapplication have not been followed. The school's provision for modern foreign languages has not been of a quality which results in many pupils wishing to study the courses and gaining success.
28. The school provides good access to the curriculum for vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs. There is careful attention given to access in the broadest sense, through good links forged between the learning support centre and mainstream classes.
29. A good range of vocational options are available in Years 10 and 11 in health and social care, leisure and tourism, and science. These courses are appealing more to girls than to boys but the school is aware of this and works to counter gender stereotyping. There is good leadership in the development of the vocational curriculum and provision is well managed. There are effective processes in place for formative assessment and supporting the progress of pupils. There is a good range of options with suitable progression routes to the sixth form courses. Good use is made of business links and pupils' work experience is linked to the vocational areas being studied.
30. All pupils take GNVQ ICT as part of the core curriculum. However, the range of vocational accreditation does not extend to meet the needs of the less able. For example, in ICT all pupils in Years 10 and 11 undertake GNVQ at intermediate level; not all pupils are entered for examination and almost a third of pupils entered did not achieve a pass grade.
31. Although there have been significant staff changes in recent years, the school has ensured that all subjects have sufficient staff with specialist knowledge to deliver the curriculum effectively.
32. Accommodation and resourcing for music are unsatisfactory overall. One of the classrooms used is poorly designed with pillars making it difficult to see the whole class at any given time. The music keyboards in use, although well cared for, are older than would be expected and there has been no programme of replacement. Music is not offered in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form due to small numbers of pupils opting for it when offered choices in Year 9. In previous years there has been some teaching outside the timetable when there was demand from pupils but not enough to make a timetabled class viable. The teaching of music was identified as a key issue in the previous inspection report. It remains an area for further improvement. The hall used for physical education is too small and affects the quality of pupils' work.
33. There is a satisfactory provision of enrichment activities. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in sport. A wide range of games activities are taught to cater for all interests and abilities. The achievement of the Sportsmark award is indicative of the range of extra-curricular sports provision offered. The school has applied for additional funding from the

Department of Education and Skills to improve the limited indoor space available for sport, which is currently unsatisfactory.

34. Library provision is satisfactory. The library as a resource centre provides some ICT capacity. There are ten computers with Internet access. The books and resources available are satisfactory in range and quality. The library space available is limited until the building programme is complete but it provides a good quality service in challenging surroundings.
35. The school effectively evaluates curriculum opportunities and seeks to develop the curriculum offered, taking account of innovation. An example of this is the 'Learning to Learn' programme which is timetabled for Years 7 and 8 pupils.

### **Sixth form**

36. There is a good choice of vocational subjects available to sixth form students at intermediate and advanced level. These meet the needs of many but not all potential students. The school has sought to broaden the curriculum choices available and provision is reviewed each year.
37. The needs of the less able are not well catered for. The enrichment programme is well intentioned but some pupils cannot participate because of timetable commitments from their other subjects. Key skills courses are available in communication and numeracy. IT is not offered as part of this programme and numeracy is offered at the higher level. A wider range of choices at different levels would increase flexibility and choice for all potential students.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school has **good** arrangements in place to ensure pupils' care, welfare and safety. Staff provide **very good** personal support and guidance. The school has **good** procedures in place to ascertain the views of pupils but many pupils do not feel that their views are always considered.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has a well-organised network of support which identifies pupils in need of help and provides effective support for them.
- The school carries out surveys of pupils' views regularly but some pupils feel that the school does not always listen to their concerns and some feel undervalued by the school.
- Pupils support each other well and older pupils, including sixth form students, carry out peer mentoring.
- The school has good induction procedures to ensure smooth transfer from its many contributing primary schools.

### **Commentary**

38. Health and safety procedures are good and staff are vigilant in the care and welfare of pupils. Child protection procedures are well organised and effective, with regular staff briefings. This is a school which genuinely cares about the well-being of pupils and this is reflected in the positive Catholic ethos.
39. Induction procedures for pupils joining Year 7 are well planned and effectively help pupils to settle quickly, a view which is confirmed by pupils. A large number of primary schools are involved and visits are made to all of these schools with a good exchange of information.
40. A notable feature of the school is the extensive network of support for pupils who require extra help, either with their work or on a personal level. Parents value this support and several parents took the time to write to inspectors detailing the good, caring pastoral support when their children were particularly troubled. Staff involved in different aspects of school life,

including a lay chaplain, work well together to identify the needs of individual pupils, and some innovative approaches have been introduced to deal with potential problems. Stress and anger management techniques, taught by trained professionals, help pupils when dealing with examination situations or with behavioural difficulties. The work of the learning mentors and staff in the social inclusion centre and learning support centre is particularly strong. Pupils who would benefit from extra support and those whose attendance or behaviour is causing concern are helped to resolve their problems by committed, skilful and experienced staff. Older pupils have been trained as peer mentors, supporting and advising younger pupils and the school has a 'buddy' system which is appreciated by younger pupils.

41. The school consults pupils regularly by carrying out surveys of their views. Although many pupils believe that the school council is not wholly effective, the profile and effectiveness of the council are increasing in the school and members have been successful in implementing improvements such as the 'chill-out room' and better supervision on school transport. Many pupils, particularly older ones, are unhappy about other aspects of the school's consideration of their views and some feel that the school undervalues some of its pupils, especially those in lower attaining groups. In addition, a large number of pupils are resentful and feel that some school rules and procedures are unfair.

### **Sixth form**

42. Students in the sixth form receive good support and guidance. They regularly meet with tutors and are provided with targets and action plans which are monitored regularly. Students appreciate this support and the commitment of staff who provide it. Feedback on their work and advice on how to improve are reported by pupils to be good. Additional support is offered with revision sessions in holiday time prior to examinations. One innovative approach which has been piloted in the sixth form is the introduction of the Peak Performance Programme, a technology-based scientific approach to managing stress and emotions which may impact on learning. Students are provided with adequate information and advice when making choices about higher education, training and employment.
43. Although students are happy with most aspects of life in the sixth form and appreciate that the constraints of current building work have led to limited accommodation for study facilities, many feel that the school does not always treat them as young adults. Some are unhappy that common room facilities are sometimes locked and that they are not always given the freedom of choice, which they expected as sixth form students.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school has **good** links with parents and the community. There are **very good** links with local primary schools and **satisfactory** links with other schools and colleges.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school's curricular links with its main contributing schools and the sharing of expertise with these schools contributes very well to effective partnerships.
- The school provides a good facility for community learning in ICT.
- Review days provide good opportunities to inform parents of pupils' progress and are well supported.
- The school has good community links to support pupils' learning.

### **Commentary**

44. Parents who expressed a view about the school are mostly very supportive and generally hold the school in high regard. Some have reservations about the information they receive and some about how the school consults parents and acts upon their suggestions.

45. The method of consulting parents about pupils' progress has recently been changed and consultation evenings have been replaced by 'review days'. This has proved to be popular with parents. The school monitors attendance at these reviews and they have been a resounding success, with over 93 per cent of parents of Year 9 pupils receiving feedback on their child's progress. This, coupled with annual written reports and interim reports, provides good information for parents.
46. A newly-constructed community building, located in the school grounds on land made available by the LEA, provides tuition for ICT as well as a useful 'drop-in' facility for computer access. School staff worked very hard to obtain the necessary funding to launch this facility which uses their expertise and makes available a large range of courses open to the public.
47. The school has particularly good links with local primary schools, some but by no means all of which are connected to the school's status as a technology college. Staff from the design and technology department work with several primary schools, spending six weeks with each school and providing expertise and resources not normally available to primaries. Other good links include ICT, science, religious education, music and physical education. This is of considerable benefit to pupils in the primary schools, and in the case of physical education, where many secondary pupils are involved in the delivery of accredited coaching courses, there is good promotion of personal development. Outreach to other schools also includes visits from the chaplain.
48. The school has developed good community links through its work experience programme and through the promotion of citizenship. Local industry, hospitals and educational establishments provide placements for pupils. Local groups and organisations such as Tranmere Rovers FC and Merseyside Travel contribute well to the teaching of personal, social, health and citizenship education. During the inspection TravelSafe gave a presentation to the school council on the subject of safety on transport.

### **Sixth form**

49. Parents of sixth form students are fully informed and are involved in reviews of students' work. Parents are contacted if students fall behind with their coursework. The school has effective links with one local college, which visits the school regularly to inform students about possible choices, but overall, links with colleges and other schools are underdeveloped.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The quality of leadership and management is **very good**. Governance is **satisfactory** and governors work well with the headteacher who provides **very good vision and leadership**. She is well supported by senior colleagues who work effectively as a team. There is good leadership from the heads of subjects and year leaders. The school is **well managed** with excellent financial control systems.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Strategic planning clearly reflects the vision of the school's leaders.
- There is a clear focus on innovative approaches to improving the quality of learning.
- The school has a very rigorous self-review process that results in regular and concise evaluations of progress in all areas.
- Effective data management systems analyse examination and assessment data.
- There is too much variability in the way subject teachers use data to inform teaching.
- A good commitment is made to professional development and a well-structured programme for newly qualified teachers.

- There are very strong financial systems, which are effectively used to help the school achieve its educational priorities.
- The high level of fixed term pupil exclusions does not reflect the school's inclusive aims.

## Commentary

50. This is an improving school. It reflects the headteacher's vision and very positive influence. She has built up an effective team of senior managers who in turn offer very good leadership, overall, in their areas of responsibility. The headteacher is very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of leadership throughout the school and takes appropriate action to adjust responsibilities and areas of influence to match these. Governors are effective in their role and work well with school leaders and managers to offer clear educational direction. The needs of the school are well understood and senior managers have successfully taken a lead in the planning for improvement. However, in some cases the implementation of policies does not fully contribute to the aspiration of a wholly inclusive school. This has led to a degree of disquiet among pupils and is linked to the high level of fixed term exclusions.
51. The senior team debate strategies for improvement and see themselves as learners as well as leaders. Strategies have been deployed to raise the quality of teaching and provide for the different learning styles of pupils; the evidence from lesson observations shows that this is beginning to have a beneficial effect on the standards of achievement in a number of subjects. The performance of different subjects is closely monitored and action taken to improve standards of leadership and management where necessary. The school has identified areas for support and effectively used external agencies such as the local education authority to provide monitoring, consultancy and advice.
52. The overall quality of management is good. Many subjects are effectively led and managed. The strategic planning of departments is well constructed and is effectively linked to whole-school priorities; it sets high expectations and identifies actions to provide beneficial change. This is particularly noticeable in English where results are very good and the department works very effectively as a team. There has been significant staff change over the past two years, but good systems have been established to ensure that improvement continues.
53. The school has a very rigorous self-evaluation process. Subject managers, accountable for evaluating their areas of responsibility, engage in an effective discussion with a member of the senior leadership team on a termly basis. A concise subject report is agreed and forms a valuable source of evidence for management decisions. A great deal of time is devoted to the regular contact between senior, departmental and year leaders. Consequently, the effectiveness of communication and the level of knowledge of senior staff are apparent in the effective running of the school and the rising standards.
54. Plessington is a data-rich school. There are very effective systems to collate and analyse assessment data at the senior level. Good use is made of the data to plan for the future and to identify areas for intensive support. There is good provision of data to subject teachers, form tutors and year heads. Variability exists in the way departments make use of this data. In some subjects, such as English, history and physical education, the knowledge of pupils' prior attainment is used effectively to plan for learning; pupils are very knowledgeable about their targets for the future and how to get there. Pupils in some other subjects, such as mathematics, geography and design and technology, are much less knowledgeable.
55. A high commitment is made to the continuous professional development of both teaching and support staff. Teachers are encouraged to become lead professionals in specific development areas such as accelerated learning and receive training as trainers to enable effective dissemination of improvement strategies. The effectiveness of these developments is shown in the variety of learning styles observed. A very good programme of support for newly qualified teachers has led to the good integration of high numbers of new staff into the school. There are

clear procedures for the evaluation of their progress throughout the year and ample opportunities for personal development. Other new, but experienced, entrants to the school report good induction procedures and they feel well supported by their departments.

56. There are very strong financial systems, which are clearly used to help the school achieve its aims and objectives. Money is accurately tracked, including the high numbers of external grants. The financial manager is able to identify procedures to ensure that best value is achieved in the awarding of different contracts, but governors do not make use of external evaluations to check on the outcomes of major spending decisions. The day-to-day organisation of the school is very effectively managed. Good progress has been made in looking at reforming the demands on the work force in line with government guidance. However, the reporting procedures in the contacting of parents about the absence of pupils from individual sixth form subject lessons continues to make burdensome administrative demands on subject teachers. External funding has been used well to support the retention and recruitment of staff.

### Sixth form

57. There is a clear direction for the development of the sixth form, set by the headteacher and senior leaders in the school. There has been good leadership of the development of a curriculum provision to widen the range of vocational programmes. Subject leaders offer good leadership and management of their individual disciplines. Appropriate subject-based training has been established where teachers have lacked the experience in teaching A-level. The self-evaluation of different subject departments is very effectively managed through the whole-school process.
58. The sixth form is cost effective overall, despite the maintenance of some very small individual subject groups (particularly at A-level). The school has analysed the costs of provision in relation to the funding provided through the Learning and Skills Council. However, some students are allowed to take subjects for which they have limited prior attainment.

### Financial information

#### *Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003*

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,477,496
Total expenditure	3,343,851
Expenditure per pupil	2,635

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	71,421
Balance carried forward to the next	133,645

# PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision for English is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good improvement in standards is driven by exceptional leadership.
- High quality departmental self-evaluation is related to planning, classroom practice and pupil progress.
- The high quality of relationships enables pupils to focus on their learning.
- There is use of innovative teaching approaches.
- A high proportion of very good teaching is well matched to pupils' needs.

#### Commentary

59. Since 2000 there has been a fast improvement in standards of English and results in 2003 indicated that pupils who entered the school with below average results reached a standard well above similar schools by the end of Year 9. This included good results for the most able pupils.
60. In GCSE both English language and literature results in 2003 were significantly above average, with boys, unusually, performing better than girls. Literature results are particularly strong, illustrating the very good rate of progress pupils make in English at this school.
61. Standards of work in lessons match the high standards achieved in national tests and examinations in all three areas of English work. Most pupils listen well and respond confidently in class discussion and read at good levels for their age and ability. Above all they write fluently, and their well-structured extended pieces are particularly impressive.
62. This success is built on teaching that is never less than good and often very good or excellent, particularly in the sixth form. There is very good teacher knowledge, a very good standard of planning and very positive relationships with pupils of all ability levels, focused on learning needs. Expectations of pupils' work and behaviour are high, and teachers analyse preferred learning styles to ensure an appropriate balance of activities in lessons. Questioning is well differentiated to help include pupils from the full range of ability, and the expertise staff gain from marking national tests is used to plan and assess pupils' work. There is a very good, consistent approach to assessment, helping pupils understand how to improve. However, these analytical approaches do not stifle the creative approach of teachers or reduce pupils' opportunities to use their imagination.
63. Pupils respond enthusiastically to a rich and stimulating diet of work that incorporates a good balance of speaking and listening, reading and writing. They listen and respond well in lessons and are used to the demands of working in pairs and groups. Pupils enjoy the well-planned range of interesting texts they encounter, including media texts, and have strong support to develop good analytical skills. This is achieved by the use of techniques, such as 'mind-mapping', which help them use visual means to structure their thoughts and emotional responses. This improves the quality of their spoken or written ideas. While teachers give pupils many opportunities to express their own ideas, pupils are sometimes unquestioning in their response and need encouragement to challenge what they hear.



64. The challenge for the department is to make good teaching even better, particularly through the better match of the pace of group work to pupils' needs. The staff make good use of the ICT resources at their disposal, but better resources are needed to develop ways to give pupils more opportunity for independent work.
65. The head of department has given exceptional personal and intellectual leadership to an enthusiastic, expert team. Their commitment to applying insights from a range of research to classroom practice strengthens and invigorates their work. Self-evaluation is rigorous and informs this ongoing development. There is very good support for newer members of the team.
66. Since the last inspection the department has made very good progress and standards have improved in all key stages. The department has been identified as a leading department in its local education authority and shares its expertise willingly.

### **Drama**

67. The drama department is separately organised and has been restructured since the last inspection, so that pupils do not have access to drama in Years 7, 8 and 9. This creates recruitment issues for GCSE drama, and a challenge for pupils to achieve at examination level. Nonetheless they succeed well, particularly in the practical aspects of the subject. Teaching is good with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable head of department, well supported by two part-time staff. There is a good quality space for practical work and although numbers are small, especially at A-level, opportunities for team teaching provide pupils with very good support for developing their skills. The department has worked well on issues raised by school self-evaluation and is striving to raise standards, particularly in written work, with some success. The department productions play an important role in the life of the school.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

68. Provision for literacy across the curriculum is good. A whole-school approach, resulting from training and guidance provided by the co-ordinator, has led to consistency in the use of effective strategies to improve speaking and listening, reading and writing. There is a good focus on the use of subject-specific vocabulary, in developing well-structured, extended writing, in paired and group discussion. Pupils are also encouraged to use *PowerPoint* to present their work to their peers.

### **Modern foreign languages**

The provision for modern foreign languages is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Curriculum provision for modern foreign languages has not been good enough to encourage many pupils to study French or Spanish in Years 10 and 11.
- No students are studying a foreign language in the sixth form.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Departmental development planning for improvement is good.
- Pupil use of ICT is limited.
- All pupils are not equally challenged to improve.

### **Commentary**

69. Most pupils observed attained in line with national expectations and some achieved well in Years 7 to 9. Progress in most lessons is good and many pupils show good motivation and achievement. In both French and Spanish lessons many pupils respond fluently. Use of the target language by teachers and pupils is good and there are frequent opportunities for pair and

group work. In Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils listen and respond well, although written work is sometimes unchallenging. More work is needed to develop reading skills at all levels in French and Spanish.

70. Teaching and learning are good with a high proportion of very good lessons. Teachers set attainable objectives and give good support and feedback. The use of ICT by teachers to lead language work is very good. However, there is insufficient pupil use of ICT for language learning. Match of task to pupils' needs is mostly achieved by teacher intervention and there is an insufficient variety of ways of setting work and offering success. In Years 7 to 9 there is clear evidence of the successful impact of teaching and learning routines from the national strategy.
71. The number of pupils taking modern foreign languages at Plessington in Years 10 and 11 is very small indeed. There is only one, wide ability, French group in Year 11. In Year 10 a small 'fast-track' Spanish group is progressing very well and demonstrates high attainment. There are currently no students taking courses in the sixth form. There are strengths in the current leadership and management of the subject but these have not yet resulted in provision which leads pupils to wish to continue their studies beyond Year 9.
72. There is a good handbook with schemes of work for Year 7 and Year 8. More work is needed to complete the schemes of work. There is now a comprehensive assessment and record-keeping system. This allows pupil tracking and informed target setting. A self-review system is in place which results in detailed action planning. Resources have been purchased to improve teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 and also improve the use of ICT.
73. There has been some progress since the last inspection in Years 7 to 9 and in planning and assessment. Teaching and learning are good. However, provision does not translate into good examination results and now even fewer pupils continue their studies beyond Year 9. Disapplication arrangements should have been properly implemented with regard to the study of modern foreign languages and statutory requirements have not been met.
74. The current leadership and management of the department together with good teaching in Years 7 to 9 are encouraging signs that the unsatisfactory provision and examination results of recent years can be improved.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

- Planning in Years 7 to 9 is clearly linked to the national strategy and is providing good challenge to lower attaining pupils.
- There is insufficient planning for pupils with different abilities which sometimes restricts the pace of progress of the higher attaining pupils.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking and solve problems.
- There is some inspirational teaching of the lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils in the lower attaining sets in Years 10 and 11 show poor attitudes and they have poor numeracy skills.
- Teachers are good at clearly explaining the work so that pupils are provided with methods to follow.

## **Commentary**

75. Overall standards, for pupils in Year 9, are below the national average, due to a lower proportion of pupils attaining higher grades than would be expected. However, attainment is improving over time, with the 2003 results better than those in 2002.

76. Standards for pupils in Year 11 are significantly below the national average. Few pupils gain the highest grades in GCSE and in 2003 too many pupils failed to achieve any grade. The effect of previous staffing instability within the department is continuing to affect the work of some current GCSE groups.
77. The work seen in pupils' books reflects the pattern of the examination results. Standards for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are generally in line with national expectations, but pupils in the upper sets are not all progressing at a pace that would ensure that they achieve at the higher levels. In contrast the work of the lower sets is challenging and these pupils are achieving well.
78. In Years 10 and 11 pupils in the lowest sets show poor attitudes to mathematics, the standard of their work is poor and they demonstrate poor numeracy skills. Thanks to some good instructional teaching, pupils in the upper and middle sets show an ability to follow mathematical routines and cope with a satisfactory range of work. However, few pupils show confidence with the most difficult work.
79. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory throughout the age range. There are examples of good teaching in Years 10 and 11, which relates the work effectively to examination requirements. In Years 7 to 9 there is some very good, inspirational, teaching of the lower sets. This provides challenging and motivational learning that results in these pupils making good progress and enjoying their lessons. For example, a lower attaining group of Year 7 pupils were enabled to grasp algebraic concepts through active involvement with dice games. The sensitive teacher and learning assistant support gave pupils an opportunity to explore and explain their work. The small number of unsatisfactory lessons were characterised by able pupils not being sufficiently challenged. Some of the teachers' planning does not take into account the range of abilities within the sets and results in some pupils making slower progress than they should.
80. This is a newly-formed department with many members having joined in the current school year and the longest serving only the previous year. Members are now starting to form a team and are co-operating well to restructure the scheme of work in Years 7 to 9, using the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, and plan their teaching together. This is resulting in some good challenge for the lower sets, but has not yet effectively raised the expectations of pupils in the higher sets – who are not being provided with sufficient opportunities to solve problems and develop independent thinking skills. The range of oral questions provides insufficient opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking and to develop confidence.
81. The leadership and management of the mathematics department are satisfactory. The department is well resourced and is providing a good range of practical activities. ICT is used well by the teachers to add interest to lessons. There is a well-structured half-termly assessment process, but pupils are insufficiently aware of their targets to be clear about what they need to do to improve. However, specific funding is being used to target small groups of pupils with some specific intervention teaching out of normal lessons, and computer-based software is providing a way of improving numerical skills, both in school and with feeder primary schools.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

82. Pupils demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are marginally below average, but generally sufficient for them to be able to gain access to the other subjects they study. There are some subjects where specific reference is made to mathematical concepts and skills. For example, in art, pupils study the Golden Section, use rotation securely within their work and analyse Islamic and Celtic designs for geometric shapes. However, in science progress in one topic was slowed by problems with percentages.
83. Teachers have received training in how to recognise opportunities to incorporate mathematical ideas into their lessons. However, in few subject departments is enough emphasis placed on

teaching mathematical skills. Work is continuing on a whole-school numeracy policy, and some departments have references to it in their handbooks. This process has been slowed by staff changes, and the present numeracy co-ordinator is new to the school and having to re-establish the development process. The mathematics department is raising the profile of mathematics with a range of clubs and out of normal school hours provision.

## SCIENCE

The provision for science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 is good.
- The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9 remains below national expectations.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- The teaching and learning resources in the department are very good.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and have good relationships with their pupils.
- The current laboratory accommodation is insufficient and some science lessons are taught in classrooms.

### Commentary

84. National test results at the end of Year 9 have improved over the last three years but are still below average. Standards are also below those achieved by pupils in similar schools judged on prior attainment. However, the standard of work observed during the inspection was generally in line with national expectations.
85. At first sight, attainment in the GCSE double award course also appears to be below average with only 40 per cent of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C in 2003. However, when the results of pupils taking the separate science GCSE courses in physics, chemistry and biology are taken into account, the A\*-C percentage increases to a figure in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-G is slightly above average. This represents a clear improvement since the last inspection.
86. Teaching from Year 7 to 11 is generally good. An example of a very good lesson was with a Year 10 class investigating the effect of surface area on osmosis. Learning objectives were explained at the start and revisited at the end of the lesson to ensure that pupils were aware of what they had learnt. The teacher's explanations were very clear and the lesson contained a rich variety of pupil activities and stimuli: teacher demonstrations, well-focused practical work, strong visual images in a *PowerPoint* presentation and a short video clip. This kept the pupils fully interested in the subject matter throughout the lesson so that high quality learning took place. A significant weakness observed in another lesson judged to be unsatisfactory was due to inadequate subject knowledge by the teacher. This led to pupils becoming confused about what they were doing. When teachers are required to teach outside their main specialism, a mutually supportive system is needed to check subject knowledge and offer appropriate help and guidance.
87. The leadership and management of the science department are very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the future of science in this school. His hard work and strong dedication to bringing about continuous improvement sets a good example to the rest of the science staff. He has established a harmonious team of staff all united in their endeavour to improve standards. There is a detailed development plan for science, identifying appropriate priorities with realistic costing and strategies for achieving them. Fresh innovations are always being considered. The introduction of 'Thinking Science' and applied science are notable examples. The advanced vocational science course continues to meet a clear demand and maintains a good standard of teaching. Results over recent years have been very good with a

100 per cent pass rate being maintained. The day-to-day running of the department is also very good. Detailed schemes of work have been written and a good system is in place for the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress. Monitoring of teaching is also good with in-class support being offered by experienced teachers to the newly qualified and inexperienced teachers whenever the timetable allows it.

88. The science department has very good technical support with a team of well-qualified and experienced technicians. The chief technician is highly organised and particularly skilful in getting good value for money when making purchases from the scientific suppliers.
89. The number of laboratories is currently insufficient, resulting in some science lessons being taught in classrooms but the new building programme taking place in the school should soon remedy this.
90. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved in Year 11 and the arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress and use of data for target setting have improved significantly. Teaching and learning resources have improved, particularly in the extent and range of textbooks. The introduction of a vocational course at GCSE has enriched the curriculum provision in science.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The provision for ICT is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership of ICT at department and senior management level provides clear vision.
- The subject knowledge of specialist teachers is good.
- Differentiation and planning do not cater sufficiently for the needs of individual pupils, particularly the less able.
- Assessment at Years 7 to 9 is inconsistent and does not take account of the full breadth of National Curriculum.
- Resourcing for ICT across the school is much improved since the last inspection.

### **Commentary**

91. Standards achieved by pupils in examinations at Year 11 are above national average. Reported teacher assessments at Year 9 are well above national average. Standards observed in lessons and on examination of pupils' work during the inspection broadly matched national expectations.
92. Many pupils achieve well but this is not the case for a significant minority, particularly the less able. In 2003, almost one third of pupils did not achieve a pass grade in the GNVQ course. There is currently no alternative accreditation on offer to these pupils. In lessons observed on the use of a spreadsheet to model mobile phone costs, less able pupils did not achieve because teachers' planning did not take their individual needs into account.
93. The vast majority of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have good specialist knowledge and convey this to pupils with everyday examples of uses of ICT. In lessons which are taught well, lesson objectives are clear and frequently referred to. These lessons start with a clear review of what pupils already know, and build on this.
94. There are well-planned assessment structures to support and inform pupils on how to improve. However, these are not used consistently to reinforce ongoing work and pupils are often unclear of how individual tasks fit into extended projects. For example, some Year 7 pupils could not link their targets to ongoing work; this was also the case with Year 10 pupils working on a logo and letterhead for a fictional company. Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is

inaccurate because it does not reflect the breadth of National Curriculum work. It is based on the GNVQ units completed in Year 9. However, no mechanism exists to include pupils' work on other aspects of ICT, such as the units of work delivered in Years 7 and 8, or pupils' use of ICT in other subjects.

95. Leadership of ICT is good. The head of department has a clear vision for the role of ICT within, and beyond, the school. The team of specialist teachers is effective and their subject knowledge is good. They demonstrate the ability and motivation to continue to develop and deliver the vision. The choice of GNVQ course in Years 10 and 11 has been a significant factor in overall school improvement, although it does not currently cater sufficiently for less able pupils. Appropriate use is made of on-line materials to support this course. A member of the senior leadership team has overall responsibility for the use of ICT in other subjects. This is an effective structure.
96. The previous inspection report identified the availability of ICT resources within subject departments, and teaching of ICT in Years 10 and 11, as key issues. These have been addressed and improvement is good.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

97. The use of ICT to support teaching across the school is good. The use of teacher laptop computers and digital projectors enhances pupils' experiences in many lessons. There is a large and developing resource of teaching and learning materials available. There is good use of ICT by pupils in some subjects, for example in English and science. However, there are too few structured opportunities for pupils' use of ICT in history, geography, art and music.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **History**

The provision for history is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- This is a good department with rising standards over the last three years.
- Specialist staff work well as a team.
- Impressive documentation and systems include data analysis.
- There is a lack of consistency in some teachers' marking and there is not always a good match of work to pupils' abilities.
- There is an over-reliance on traditional whole-class teaching.

### **Commentary**

98. Results in Year 9 are well above national expectations, with a significant improvement by boys. By Year 11 pupils are achieving well above national expectations, with the 2003 GCSE results showing a significant increase in A\*-C grades. Girls are performing significantly better than boys.
99. Most pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9. By Year 9 the standard attained by the majority is above average. Good progress is made in knowledge of the past and the skills of historical enquiry. Achievement is generally good. The standard attained by girls is generally higher than boys though boys' attainment is improving significantly, especially amongst higher attaining groups. Lower attaining pupils are able to structure their work with reasonable accuracy, though they are weaker at drawing independent conclusions from analysing a range of historical sources. Pupils with special needs are often unable to undertake some written

tasks due to the high levels of literacy required and consequently these pupils make limited progress.

100. The standard attained by the majority of pupils by the Year 11 is above average. They have good subject knowledge and know how to use historical sources to study the past. Higher attaining pupils write well and undertake historical enquiry critically to develop an argument and arrive at a balanced judgement. Lower attaining pupils are weaker at using sources to come to independent judgements. However, they are able to write basic information about particular events and historical figures and can sometimes see the links between cause and effect. Most pupils make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and their achievement is good.
101. The quality of teaching and learning is good and at times very good. In many lessons teachers show their expert subject knowledge and are often imaginative in the methods employed to gain pupils' interest and stimulate learning. Most pupils make good progress and achieve well. However, some lower ability pupils struggle with texts and find a significant proportion of work very challenging. Whilst teachers use different questioning techniques and give individual support there is sometimes a mismatch of tasks to meet pupils' particular needs. Very good teaching in a Year 11 lesson engaged and kept even disaffected pupils' interest and motivation. They worked with a very high level of enthusiasm and concentration and relationships in the class were excellent. The achievement of these pupils was very good. The pace of some other lessons, however, is slowed by too much teacher direction, and lengthy introductions. These lessons have too little pupil activity, for example in groups or in role-play, and too few plenary sessions to consolidate learning.
102. Assessment systems are good. Homework is regularly set and contributes to pupils' progress. Most pupils know what they need to do to improve their work but diagnostic marking is inconsistent especially in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum enriches pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through the study of topics on the Holocaust, slavery, World War I and native American Indians.
103. Leadership and management are good and focused on raising standards. The scheme of work meets statutory requirements and has been matched to teachers' expertise and pupils' interest. Impressive documentation shows a commitment to policy development, data analysis and teachers' continuing professional development. Teachers are supportive of each other and the head of department has a clear vision for the subject, which he works hard to achieve. There have been very good improvements since the last inspection though there are still difficulties with access to computers for pupils.

## Geography

The provision for geography is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- ICT as a teaching tool is a strength across the department.
- Marking of pupils' books is not consistent and does not provide enough strategies to enable pupils to improve.
- There is insufficient match of work to pupils' abilities, especially for the more able.
- The variety of teaching and learning strategies deployed by the department enhance the quality of learning.
- Target setting is not rigorous and consistent across the department.

### Commentary

104. Pupils achieve well in geography and, by the end of Year 9, the knowledge and understanding of the majority has been lifted to above national expectations. Pupils are able to use geographical terms appropriately and know how to read maps and use atlases. They can

recognise, for example, features and characteristics of the Amazonian rainforest and threats to a tropical environment. However, by Year 11 pupils are attaining below average levels and there is evidence of some underachievement. However, the overall trend is rising. The underachievement is being addressed in recent changes to the GCSE course and in developing a range of teaching styles.

105. Much has been done to engage pupils in Years 7 to 9; for example, an audit of preferred learning styles ensures the department deploys a variety of teaching strategies to engage all learners. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are positive. Pupils enjoy geography and respond well to interesting and engaging teaching. For example, a Year 9 lesson on fair trade involved pupils in testing fair trade products against well-known company goods for quality, price and value for money. In this instance what enhanced the learning were the extent to which pupils were involved and engaged, and the teacher's high expectations of all pupils.
106. The departmental focus on assessment for learning through the national strategy is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. A strong emphasis on skills training, especially though literacy, is evident in lesson planning. Extended writing is built into schemes of work and pupils are being supported in their ability to describe geographical phenomena. The acting head of department has refined the use of data to inform planning and this is linking with more systematic target setting. However, there is a need for greater consistency in the target-setting process, especially in Years 7 to 9. Teacher assessment in these years is secure through standardised assessment which is moderated internally. The provision of ICT is a strength across the department where it is used as an effective teaching tool by staff. However, the opportunities for using ICT as a learning tool require further development. Whilst some of the more able pupils were aware of their current level of performance and targets, less able pupils tended to be unclear as to current levels and strategies for improvement. There is evidence of some pupil underachievement in Years 10 and 11 and whilst the department should be commended for its use of ICT and variety of teaching styles, there is a need for greater match of work to ensure more able pupils receive a higher level of challenge in lessons. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have improved. The majority of pupils in Year 9 achieve above the national average and make satisfactory progress. The acting head of department has a clear vision and understanding of what needs to be done in order to raise standards further.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

The provision for design and technology is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- The quality of teaching and teacher expertise is good.
- The use of assessment to set targets for individual pupils is insufficient in some lessons.
- There is insufficient opportunity for staff to share good practice across the department

#### **Commentary**

107. Standards achieved by pupils by the end of Year 9 are above average. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are applying the processes of designing and making to a good standard. The work of designers and commercial production processes are being used successfully to extend pupils' understanding of designing. The work forms a well-structured scheme of work for Years 7 to 9, with appropriate progression. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and they achieve satisfactory standards.



108. Standards achieved at GCSE in 2002 and 2003 were significantly above the national average. Results in textiles show a very high standard and portfolios show consistency, detailed work and creativity. Food technology also achieves good standards. Resistant materials does not achieve the same level of consistency in content and presentation. In a product design lesson in Year 10, good standards were achieved. Pupils' achievement in designing and making is good overall and their attitude to work is good. Progress in lessons is mostly good.
109. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are well prepared, enthusiastic about their subject and show a good level of subject expertise. Some very good teaching was seen in all areas. The most successful lessons had a clear structure; learning objectives were shared with pupils and a good range of teaching strategies was used to generate good pace and high expectations for pupils' work. However, this was not the case in all lessons. In some lessons the pace of work and pupils' understanding of working to targets need to be improved. There are insufficient opportunities for staff to observe good practice in the department. Support staff are well briefed to work with their pupils.
110. The leadership and management of the department are very good and provide a clear vision and direction. The quality of leadership and management in all subject areas is also very good. There is also some good progress in the use of National Curriculum levels with pupils in Years 7 to 9. However, in Years 10 and 11, more examples of work and grade-related guidance are needed to help pupils achieve their potential target grade. The current level of resources in the department is satisfactory.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

The provision for art and design is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is good leadership and management.
- Good progression through the scheme of work is achieved, with very good attention to cultural understanding.
- There is good quality teaching.
- Poor timetabling affects the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form.

### **Commentary**

111. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average, and achievement is good for the majority of pupils. The emphasis given to the development of drawing skills lays the foundation for success in the later stages of education. The very good attention to the study of art and artists, and the range of media provided, together with the attention to literacy and numeracy, ensure that the majority of pupils achieve satisfactorily.
112. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were well above average in A\*-C grades and excellent in A\*-G grades. Achievement in drawing and painting is high for pupils of all abilities because teaching is good. Robust, confident drawings of landscape, using biro pens, pencils and felt-tips, based on the study of Paul Nash, showed how different drawings can vary in style depending on pupils' interpretation of the subject. Pupils are developing a good knowledge and sound understanding of artistic achievements of other cultures.
113. The quality of teaching is good and teachers expect pupils to do well. The scheme of work, which provides interesting starting points using a range of artists from cultures across the world, is supported by very good visual resources. This, together with individual conversations with pupils, makes the work accessible to pupils of all abilities. There was one unsatisfactory lesson observed. In this lesson, although the planning and content were satisfactory,

classroom management, engagement with pupils and the match of the work to the abilities of pupils were not satisfactory. This left pupils, especially those of average ability and lower attaining pupils, not knowing what to do.

114. Pupils are given sufficient time to study art at GCSE level, but the organisation of the timetable into single lessons is unsatisfactory because it wastes too much time and restricts broadening of the curriculum further, particularly in three-dimensional work, visits and drawing in the locality. In Years 7 to 9 the use of ICT is underdeveloped because of the limited access to computers.
115. The leadership and management are good. There is a strong commitment to monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils alike. This has led to the improvements in standards since the previous inspection.

## Music

The overall quality of provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership and management of music are unsatisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9.
- There is no music provision in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- Insufficient use is being made of ICT.
- Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory.
- Pupils have a good attitude to the subject.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory in one room used.

### Commentary

116. Standards in by Year 9 are in line with the national average. There is no difference in the overall achievement of boys and girls.
117. In Years 10 and 11 there were no GCSE entries in 2003.
118. In Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations, from five entries in theory examinations at Grade 4, there were two merits and three passes. From six entries for singing at grade four, there were two merits and four passes.
119. There were no entries for A-level music.
120. Achievement by Year 9 is good. Pupils have a good understanding of note values, rhythmic patterns and various scales, and have good performance skills on tuned percussion instruments and keyboards. This represents an improvement on the previous inspection. Year 8 pupils achieve well in their understanding of major, minor, pentatonic and chromatic scales. They effectively identify and explore the relationships between sounds and how music reflects different intentions. The pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into all aspects of the lesson and make good progress. A significant minority of pupils remain unclear about the elements of music and basic theory. Higher attaining pupils and those who are gifted and talented are able instrumentalists who perform with growing confidence. There is no significant variation between the performance of boys and girls.
121. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lesson objectives, displayed on the whiteboard or *PowerPoint* and explained to pupils, give a clear focus and good pace to lessons. Planning is detailed and follows guidance given by the National Curriculum. The teachers and visiting instrumentalists have a secure knowledge of the subject and are able performers. A range of teaching styles helps to sustain the pupils' interest. The substantial majority of pupils enjoy

lessons and are keen to learn. Pupils learn well as a class and in group activities. For example, Year 9 pupils enjoy listening to *Danse Macabre* by Saint Saens and in small groups effectively identify a range of musical elements. Pupil to teacher relationships are mature and productive. The pupils' work is effectively assessed as the lesson proceeds but this information is not used effectively to enable pupils to know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. ICT is not used sufficiently. Teaching is best when pupils are given a range of activities related to listening, composing, performing and appraising. Teaching is least effective when a small minority of pupils are allowed to become passive, making little contribution to the lesson. Fifty-four pupils benefit from instrumental tuition from visiting specialist musicians. Opportunities for music in assemblies are being missed. Extra-curricular voice and theory club, choir and band involve up to 50 pupils. This and preparation for the *And All That Jazz* show effectively complements classroom teaching.

122. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. The department does not have a provision that attracts appropriate numbers of pupils to continue their study of the subject. Departmental documentation and organisation are not of an adequate quality. Current timetabling arrangements do not allow for pupils to select music at GCSE or A-level. One music room is small and cramped and limits the scope of teachers to provide a range of learning opportunities for the pupils. Practice rooms are cluttered and cannot be used for their intended purpose so accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The provision for physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management are instrumental in devising strategies for improvement.
- Examination results have significantly improved since the last inspection.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of their pupils.
- Over 90 per cent of pupils leave the school with accreditation in physical education.
- There is a lack of indoor space for physical education.

### Commentary

123. GCSE results are well above average when compared to those in all schools. The percentage of pupils achieving A\*-C grades in both the full and short courses in 2003 was very high and generally pupils achieved better in physical education than in their other subjects. All Year 10 and 11 pupils study a short or full course GCSE or the Junior Sports Leaders' Award. An increasing number of girls now take a GCSE examination.
124. Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 where standards are in line with national expectations. However, large numbers of pupils have to use the small sports hall at the same time. This lack of space and the very poor acoustics prevent pupils from being fully involved in developing effective skills of observation, analysis and assessment. A number of lower attaining boys have poor listening skills and have difficulty in concentrating on the work presented. Target setting in relation to National Curriculum levels is in place in Years 7 to 9 and pupils are involved in evaluating their own effort, attainment and level. Pupils set targets for themselves to work towards in the next unit of work.
125. Achievement in core physical education in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. In GCSE practical and theory lessons achievement is good. In Year 11, pupils demonstrate above average skills in volleyball and a good understanding of positional play. In a Year 10 theory lesson skilful questions enabled pupils to connect back to previous learning and to extend their learning about heart rate, stroke volume, quantity and blood pressure. The teacher also demonstrated good use of ICT to aid learning.

126. Teaching is good overall with some very good teaching in Year 11. Teachers have a very good understanding of their subject and plan lessons well. Pupils are challenged at their level of competence and consequently the majority make good progress. Teachers manage the groups very well and pupils respond to the good relationships they have with their teachers. There is now a balanced programme of activities for all pupils and a wider range of teaching and learning styles has been introduced. Pupils have a positive attitude and show interest in their lessons. The department is involved in the School Sports Co-ordinator Partnership and have developed strong links with the local leisure centre, feeder primary schools and sporting clubs.
127. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear vision for future development and a focus on raising standards in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are many opportunities for pupils to demonstrate active citizenship through a variety of community-based activities.
- There is only limited assessment of pupils' progress in PSHE and citizenship.
- There is limited written evidence of pupils' learning in citizenship in Years 7 to 9.
- Subject departments have identified extensive opportunities for citizenship within schemes of work.

### **Commentary**

128. Citizenship is taught as part of the programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education. Whilst citizenship opportunities have been extensively mapped across the curriculum and identified in schemes of work, delivery of citizenship is implicit rather than an explicit focus of learning in lessons.
129. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There has been whole-staff training to raise the profile of PSHE and citizenship and the head of subject has undertaken an extensive whole-school and curriculum audit, identifying opportunities for citizenship in all areas. Heads of subject have identified citizenship opportunities within schemes of work and amended departmental handbooks to include a statement about their subject contribution to the citizenship. A group of Year 10 pupils studying Spanish visited a Spanish restaurant as part of their appreciation of cultural diversity whilst in drama a group of pupils investigated social and moral issues in relation to infanticide.
130. The school is making sound progress in relation to pupil participation and responsible action. The purchase of new bike sheds, organised by the school council, highlights the extent to which pupils are encouraged to improve the school environment. Involving pupils in decision making is a strength, as the involvement of the school in the project 'Travelwise' initiative aptly illustrates.
131. The assessment of pupil progress in PSHE and citizenship is limited and not enough opportunities for accreditation are provided. Leadership and management are both good. The course has been well planned to acknowledge close links between PSHE and citizenship. Opportunities for collaborative learning, group debate and enquiry are integral to lesson planning. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for citizenship and manages the programme well. There is a clear and realistic development plan in place. The school has a sound system of monitoring of teaching and learning across subjects but PSHE and citizenship has not yet

been included within the scope of the subject reviews. Links with nationally accredited schemes that promote effective delivery of PSHE and citizenship remain underdeveloped.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, nine subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

### *Level 3 GCE AS-level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	2	100	80.1	0.0	23.7	20.0	29.9
Biology	5	40.0	65.2	20.0	11.1	16.0	20.6
Business Studies	6	66.7	76.4	16.7	16.3	18.3	26.2
Chemistry	3	100	72.7	33.3	13.9	40.0	24.1
Drama	2	100	86.5	0.0	19.6	20.0	30.6
English Literature	3	100	85.9	0.0	19.1	36.7	30.2
French	1	100	78.2	0.0	18.9	40.0	27.6
Geography	2	0.0	74.3	0.0	19.8	0.0	26.5
History	1	100	80.7	100	19.5	50.0	28.6
Mathematics	2	100	61.9	0.0	17.1	35.0	22.1
Physics	6	83.3	68.6	0.0	14.4	21.7	22.7
Religious Studies	3	100	80.2	33.3	22.6	40.0	29.8
Sports/PE Studies	3	33.3	73.2	0.0	11.4	10.0	23.1

### Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	9	100	98.6	55.6	50.2	93.3	87.5
Biology	8	100	96.4	12.5	39.2	65.0	78.6
Business Studies	8	100	98.7	12.5	36.8	72.5	80.1
Chemistry	3	100	97.6	33.3	49.0	80.0	84.9
Drama	2	100	99.5	0.0	40.1	50.0	83.6
English Literature	21	100	99.5	71.4	46.5	98.1	86.5
Design and Technology	5	100	97.8	0.0	35.0	60.0	77.9
Geography	5	100	98.7	0.0	44.5	72.0	84.0
History	7	100	99.0	14.3	44.6	80.0	84.6
Mathematics	3	66.7	96.7	66.7	55.6	73.3	88.8
Physics	5	100	96.7	20.0	44.6	68.0	81.7
Religious Studies	12	100	98.8	41.7	46.7	83.3	85.6
Spanish	4	75.0	98.3	0.0	50.2	55.0	86.9
Sports/PE Studies	6	100	98.0	16.7	30.9	76.7	75.2
Health & Social Care	12	100	93.2	0.0	22.3	60.0	63.5
Media: Communication & Production	11	100	87.9	36.4	30.5	83.6	n/a
Science	12	100	88.3	0.0	9.6	51.7	58.5
Information Technology VQ	8	87.5	87.2	62.5	27.9	87.5	64.9

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

The provision for English is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good standards of pupils' attainment.
- Very good teaching incorporates very good subject knowledge and a high level of intellectual challenge.
- Innovative approaches help students analyse complex texts.
- Very good assessment helps students to improve their work.

### Commentary

132. Standards in the sixth form are good and teaching is a strength in this area. In an excellent debate on *Dr Faustus* the students were ranged against each other speaking for or against support of Marlowe. Their arguments married detailed knowledge of the text to lively, humorous debate in which they energetically challenged the opposition's arguments. The teaching was

structured in a way which presented a high level of intellectual challenge, and a very good interactive approach which led students to analyse the text from a range of viewpoints. This was clearly leading them towards the next stage of learning which was to contrast interpretations of the play from major critics.

133. Group work on Chaucer also demonstrated the very good teaching students experience that enables them to succeed at their best level. Group size enables work to be well differentiated and the enthusiasm of the staff for the texts they teach helps to motivate the whole range of ability. Assessment is very detailed and helps students move forward in their learning.
134. The GNVQ media and communication course provides a successful alternative course for some sixth form students who benefit from its structure and focus. Results are good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Able students make good progress in their work.
- Teaching provides clear methods for students to follow, but sometimes fails to ensure that the concept is fully understood.
- Too little notice is taken, in some lessons, of the range of abilities of students when planning for their different learning needs.

### **Commentary**

135. The school offers studies in mathematics leading to AS and A-level qualifications. Students study a combination of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics modules in each year.
136. A-level results were mixed in 2003 and generally below average. In the AS examinations, at the end of Year 12, only one student out of five passed. This pass rate is poor. In the A2 examinations at the end of Year 13 two students gained good grades and one failed. Where students complete the full A-level course of study they achieve in line with expectations. However, too few students are opting to study mathematics in the sixth form and very small numbers opt to continue the subject into Year 13; at present only one student is continuing A-level mathematics. Overall, the cost effectiveness of the school's provision is unsatisfactory.
137. At present the school allows students to study mathematics if they have a C grade at GCSE. However, where students have completed an intermediate level course, they are ill prepared for the course of study at AS. There are insufficient transition arrangements to allow these students to gain the range of skills they require to make a success of the course. In addition, the planning for teaching takes insufficient account of the range of abilities within the Year 12 group, the needs of these students to work at different rates and the types of support they require.
138. The standard of the work seen was very variable, from students who are demonstrating good understanding of the basic concepts and being able to answer examination style questions, to students who have poor understanding, restricted skills and poor mathematical communication skills. In general those students with higher level entry grades at GCSE were achieving in line with expectations.
139. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Students are provided with clear explanations and further appropriate support when they are practising questions in class. However, some of the written work provided by teachers lacks precision. Some of the teaching is aimed at learning rules and methods rather than ensuring that students understand what is being studied. This results in some lower attaining and average students struggling and requiring further help



(which is freely given) outside lessons. The higher attaining students are quick to spot patterns and links to previous work and make good progress in lessons.

140. Students are supportive of the teaching and the range of help they can access. They are less happy with some gaps in learning that can result from teachers being absent and the effects this has on their progress.

## SCIENCE

### Physics

The provision for physics is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good.
- There are good relationships between staff and students.
- Resources to support the course are good.
- The proportion of students who continue from AS to A2 is low.
- Students are not adequately prepared for the practical examinations at AS and A2.
- Students under-perform in the synoptic module of the A2 examination.

#### Commentary

141. Standards of work seen during the inspection were generally in line with national expectations, but the results in the AS and A-level examinations over recent years have been below the national average and generally below the standard achieved in other subjects at the school. Students at AS-level perform badly in the practical examination and a more thorough preparation for this element of the course is required. The main difficulty at A2 appears to be the synoptic paper. More time spent reviewing past papers and showing students the natural comparisons and overlaps between topics would improve students' confidence and performance.
142. The physics teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is consistently good and sometimes very good. A very good AS lesson was observed with students being introduced to the difficult concept of standing waves. A high level of student interest was maintained by including a good mix of direct instruction, teacher demonstrations and practical work. Teachers' explanations are always very clear and humour is often used to lubricate the learning process. The relationship between the teachers and their students was noticeably good. Although there is some inconsistency in the marking of students' day-to-day work, unit tests and reports of practical work are conscientiously assessed with plenty of guidance given to students on how they can improve their future work.
143. The management of the physics department is good. Staff work closely as a team sharing their expertise and ideas and they clearly know their students well. The department knows what to do to improve standards and is increasing opportunities for students to become independent learners. ICT, in the form of computer simulations for example, is often used to very good effect in making physics concepts more easily understood. Each year the department analyses the reasons for discrepancies between examination results and predictions and takes appropriate action. For example, in 2003 it was clear that many students under-performed in the final unit of the A-level course. Special attention is now being paid to prepare the Year 13 students thoroughly for the examination paper in this A2 unit.
144. Since the last inspection progress has been satisfactory. Resources are better, particularly in the amount of ICT equipment used for teaching and learning, and the department now has a comprehensive collection of on-line and written reference material for physics. Standards

remain below those achieved in most other subjects, however, and there is room for improvement.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The provision for ICT is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The subject knowledge of teachers is good.
- Attainment in 2003 was above the national average.
- The needs of individual students are not consistently catered for, partly because of the narrow range of courses on offer.

### **Commentary**

145. Standards achieved in AVCE in 2003 were above the national average with seven out of eight students achieving a pass or higher grade. In the current year, there are significantly more students taking the course in Year 13 and a larger number again in Year 12.
146. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. This enables them to provide appropriately structured, extended activities for students. Portfolio checklists are used to encourage students to take responsibility for their own progress. Good use is made of staff expertise. For example, in lessons covering hardware and software, one of the technicians was observed explaining and demonstrating the installation of computer components, before supporting students to install the components themselves. The teacher had previously grouped the students according to ability. This was an effective method of meeting this course requirement. In another lesson, the teacher's effective planning meant that students who joined the lesson late were rapidly incorporated into the ongoing activity. Students demonstrated the ability to evaluate different documents according to style, purpose, organisation and standards. Effective teacher questioning prompted informed student response.
147. More able students are not always sufficiently challenged to achieve their best. There are examples of some students lacking the independence to take responsibility for their own learning.
148. Although accreditation in key skills is offered by the school, this does not extend to IT Key Skills. This limits the choices of students if they do not wish to pursue the AVCE course. There is no choice of level 2 provision and this particularly affects those students who have not passed the GNVQ course at age 16. Leadership of ICT is good, with a knowledgeable and enthusiastic head of department.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **History**

The provision for history is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results in AS and A2 examinations are consistently good.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to plan purposeful and varied lessons.
- Students have a very positive attitude to the subject.
- Opportunities for independent research are well established.
- Very effective use of ICT enhances teaching and learning.
- Timetable difficulties mean some students undertake the courses after school.

- Low numbers are choosing to continue from AS to A2 level.

### Commentary

149. Results at A2 in 2003 were very good, with all students achieving a pass, most at the higher grades. There was no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls and results overall matched the national average. Analysis of performance indicates good achievement by students. At AS-level in 2003 the majority of students achieved a pass with most achieving the higher grades B or C. Progress and achievement are generally good but significant numbers do not continue onto the A2 course.
150. Standards are high in both year groups and most students make good progress, some making very good progress. Most students show very good levels of understanding across a range of topics and demonstrate their skills in working with sources, analysing and synthesising evidence and researching independently. They can identify important factors that help to explain the significance of past events, and answers in class show that they understand the connections between causal factors. Whilst some students are confident in expressing their own views in lessons, others have underdeveloped presentational skills. There is evidence that students benefit from very good teaching and as a consequence the majority are able to analyse effectively and form their own ideas about the historiography of the topics under study. Good progress is made in acquiring subject knowledge, and the achievement of most students is at least satisfactory. Very good individual support ensures good achievement for less able students.
151. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' good command of the subject enables them to plan lessons that are focused and varied and which extend students' historical knowledge and skills. Students are competently using ICT to search the Internet, to make presentations in class and to produce assignments. This was evident in a good lesson in Year 13 when students used *PowerPoint* to present their research findings, in pairs, on Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. Students are diligent in lessons and have a very positive attitude to the subject and to the staff. Marking and assessment are very good and help students to understand how to improve and how to achieve the higher grades.
152. Leadership and management of the subject are good, and clear strategies for continued improvement are evident in policy and practice. Good links with a local college offer opportunities for students to improve their knowledge, undertake independent research and access resources that are not available in school. New syllabuses have improved interest and motivation and textbook resources have improved. Progress since the last inspection has been good with high standards being maintained.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The provision for physical education is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Students achieve well because of good teacher knowledge and teaching strategies.
- Marking is good and helps students to understand their progress.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.

### Commentary

153. Results in the A-level examination in 2003 were just below average with six students taking the examination. The A grade candidate's work is used as exemplar material by the examination board. There are 16 students studying at AS-level this year and similar numbers are predicted

for the future. Year 12 coursework standards are in line with national averages. Students use word processing effectively and show pride in their work. Marking of work is good, with positive and constructive comments that enable students to reflect on their work and to present a more coherent argument.

153. Standards in Year 13 show attainment to be below average caused by a lack of match between students' abilities and the course requirements. Students in Year 12 are achieving above national expectations and have made good progress since they started the course. Many make use of the Internet for research into practical examples of the cardio-vascular systems of very fit athletes. They could recall work from previous lessons concerned with receptors, bio-receptors and systems of the heart. Students achieve well due to good teaching and the high level of teachers' subject knowledge.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology – textiles and product design**

The provision for design and technology is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in design and technology are good and in textiles they are very good.
- Teaching in product design and textiles is at least good, with some very good teaching.
- Formative assessment and reporting procedures are very good.
- Some teaching is carried out in non-specialist rooms, which restricts access to specialist teaching resources and limits learning in those lessons.

#### **Commentary**

154. Standards in textiles are very good and students in 2003 achieved good results at AS and A2 levels. Standards in design and technology product design are good with students gaining good AS and A2 grades in 2003. In both subjects, student achievement was good in terms of their prior attainment.
155. Teaching in textiles and product design is at least good with some very good lessons. The quality of design work produced by students in both subjects is very good and students use a range of manufacturing processes to produce a high standard of practical work. Students are able to present their ideas effectively and are confident when discussing aspects of their 'design and make' projects.
156. The subject is well led and learning provision is well managed. There are sound processes in place for assessment, which supports learning and which helps students to critically review their work. Display of students' work in specialist areas is good and in textiles in particular the display of students' work is used effectively to promote a sense of pride and a striving for the highest quality in the work produced.
157. Some design and technology lessons are taught in non-specialist rooms, which restricts access to learning in some lessons. This has a greater effect when individual students are required to work on different aspects of their project, for example in the need to access both graphical and manufacturing processes.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

### Art and design

The provision for art and design is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good standards in art and design.
- There is good teaching.
- There is good leadership and management.
- Timetabling in single lessons is a weakness.
- There are poor facilities for independent, practical work.

### Commentary

158. Standards in the sixth form in art and design are very good, and have improved since the last inspection. GCSE A-level results in art and design are well above average. A good proportion of students achieve the higher grades, particularly the girls.
159. The quality of work, both in lessons and in students' portfolios, confirms the high standards. Students develop technical skills well and apply their knowledge and understanding of artists, designers and art movements to produce robust and confident paintings that are imaginative, creative and technically proficient. The end products, large-scale figurative and abstract paintings, are very well researched. Learning is good because students are well supported by the teaching and this gives them the confidence to experiment in a range of media. Students' critical understanding of art has improved since the last inspection: they are given opportunities in art appreciation to analyse paintings and they talk confidently about them.
160. The quality of teaching is good. Assignments are well designed and students clearly understand the assessment criteria upon which they will be judged. Teachers are supportive, demanding and enthusiastic. Opportunities are provided for students to work in groups and independently, in order to explore and evaluate works of art. Students are given regular feedback and they are aware of their progress and target grades.
161. One outstanding weakness from the previous inspection is the organisation of the timetable, which remains in single lessons for art and design. This is unsatisfactory, as time is wasted, and students' involvement in their work is cut short. This is exacerbated by the lack of dedicated studio space for sixth formers when many could continue with their work independently.
162. Leadership and management of the department are good. The courses are managed well, and students are well supported by the staff. The outstanding weakness in timetabling is a matter for the school's senior management team to resolve. The high standards and the numbers of students who continue with art courses beyond school is testimony to the good teaching and leadership.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business studies**

The provision for business studies is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in business studies are good and students achieve well in external examinations.
- Assessment is used effectively to support learning.
- Students' access to specialist resources, including computers to support learning, is restricted through the use of non-specialist rooms.

#### **Commentary**

163. Standards in business studies are good and examination results at AS and A2 level in 2003 were above the national average. The standard of coursework produced by students is generally satisfactory and that produced by a significant minority of students is good.
164. Teaching in the subject is mostly good and teachers make use of resources such as whiteboards and digital projectors. Schemes of work are well written and lessons are well planned and delivered. However, the use of non-specialist rooms for some lessons limits access to specialist resources, especially computers, to support learning. Continuing assessments are used to good effect to support learning.
165. Students enjoy the subject and are able to discuss business concepts using appropriate terminology. Students generally make good progress and are well prepared for external examinations. Students studying for the GNVQ intermediate award produce good quality portfolio work, making good use of ICT for research and the presentation of their work. The subject is well led and learning provision is well managed.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is		4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	4	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>3</b>
Attendance	4	4
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	4
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	4	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		4
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	5
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	4	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	4	3
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	2
The effectiveness of management	3	3

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).*